1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

and the shell-strata are so like and so different from any other fictile ware as to be distinguished at a glance. Hence it would seem manifest that the Seri olla must constitute a normal nucleus for the Seri esthetic; yet even here the field is practically barren, as is shown by the study of a score of ample and mortuary specimens and of thousands of sherds. The most ornate specimen seen is that depicted in plate XXXIII. Its form, like that of the balsa, is a mechanical equation of forces and materials; its body-color is that of the clay, blotched and blackened irregularly by the smoke of the firing; and its decoration is limited to 17 faint lines or bands radiating downward from the ill-shaped neck. The radial bands were evidently drawn by a finger dipped in clayey water after the vessel was otherwise finished for the firing; they are irregular in placement, width, length, and direction; they generally run in pairs, two straight lines alternating with two zigzag lines, though the circuit is completed by two zigzags drawn wide apart and separated by a single straight line. The meaning of the device (if meaning there be) was not directly ascertained; but it is suggestive that its maker and owner was the mother of the youthful warrior from whom the rattlesnake necklace was obtained (her face-symbol is that shown in the lower left figure of plate XXVI), and that the vessel was surrendered more reluctantly than any other article obtained from the tribe.

Another utensil of some importance to the tribe is a basket of the type illustrated in figure 24. It is manufactured with much skill and is used for various domestic purposes, being practically water-tight and unbreakable, and materially lighter than even the unparalleledly light fictile ware of the Seri. In form and size and weave the half dozen examples seen correspond with widespread southwestern types; yet it is noteworthy that while otherwise similar baskets are habitually decorated by other basket-making tribes, the Seri specimens were absolutely devoid of decorative devices.

Practically the only remaining artifacts available for decoration are those connected with archery; and it suffices to say that while the bows are skilfully made and the arrows constructed with exceeding pains, not a single specimen seen showed the slightest trace of symbolism or of nonutilitarian motive.

Summarily, the Seri are characterized by extreme esthetic poverty. This has been noted by the early missionaries and by the few other travelers who have approached their haunts, as well as by the vaqueros on the Encinas and Serna and other ranchos bordering their range, who know them as "los pobrecitos". All observers have been struck with their destitution and squalor; yet when the impressions are particularized they are seen to denote absence of the poor luxuries, rather than the bare necessities, of primitive life. The people are pathetically poor in the industrial sense; their equipment in artifacts—implements, weapons, utensils, habitations, apparel—is meager almost, if not quite, beyond parallel in America; yet their esthetic equipment, practically

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

517 limited as it is to a single line of symbolic portrayal, is still more abjectly meagre.

[171] Any comparison of the Seri esthetic with that of other Amerind tribes serves only to emphasize its paucity: the tribes of the plains, with their eagle-feather headdresses, elaborately arranged scalp-locks, widely varied face-painting, and ritualistic camp circles; the Pueblo peoples, with their ornate masks, elaborate altars, figured stuffs, and painted pottery; the denizens of the eastern woods, with their feather-decked peace-pipes, divinatory games, fringe-bordered garments, and prayer-inscribed arrows; the coastwise peoples of the upper Pacific, with their labrets and tattoo-marks, totem-poles and carved house-fronts, painted canoes and prodigal potlatches; the neighboring desert tribes, with their festal footraces, decorated pottery and basketry, pendent scarfs and garters, and well-wrought caskets for family fetishes; even the timid acorn-eaters of California, with their sacramental baskets, artistically befringed kilts, bead-strings of far-traveled nacre, and patiently wrought fabrics of rare feathers—all of these seem rich in esthetic motives when contrasted with "los pobrecitos" of arid Seriland.

[105] And the contrast is only intensified when the economic motives of the various tribes are compared: the industrial motives of the Seri are fairly numerous and diverse; they are skilful huntsmen, successful fishermen, capable navigators, and competent warriors (as attested by the protection of their principality for centuries), so that despite the absence of agriculture and the avoidance of commerce, their industrial range is not very far below the aboriginal average; and while they are deficient in thrift, this shortcoming is balanced by a peculiarly developed vital economy whereby they are delicately adjusted to their environment, as has been already shown. On the whole, it would appear that the Seri are not only lower in esthetic development than the contemporary tribes thus far studied, but also that they stand at the bottom of the scale in the ratio of esthetic to industrial motives.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DECORATION

000 Largely through recent researches among the American aborigines, it has been shown that decorative and many if not all other esthetic concepts normally arise in symbolism, gradually expand in conventionism, and eventually mature in a realism which is itself the source of ever-extending esthetic motives; and the observations on the lowly Seri afford opportunity for somewhat extending the generalizations based on higher tribes.

When peoples of unequal cultural development are compared, it is commonly found that the higher are the more independent in action and thought: thus, advanced peoples make conquest of nature for their own behoof, while primitive peoples are largely creatures of environment; Caucasian citizens are self-conscious lawmakers, while Amerind tribesmen are semiconsciously dominated by mysteries fearsomely